

THE BOMB

By Edith Livingston Smith.

Vladimir Valinoff reached the grand stand and scanned the faces before him. His own regular features were set in sterner mold than those of most of the merry-makers present, but he was calm.

He enjoyed horse races. What man does not? But he would not enjoy this one. Each individual of the little secret band of which he was a member (and there were so few of them that the fingers of both broad hands would almost do to count them upon) would look upon that laughing, gay, expectant crowd this afternoon, all knowing—he shuddered slightly. Ah well! the lot had not fallen to him this time and he was thankful.

Yes, they were all present—that was to avoid suspicion. He knew without looking—Lomanstoff and Ludwig, keen, shrewd old Pantli, the others who counted not so much, and Paul Raulanki. It was terrible that it should be Paul, he had so much of life yet to live if one of the others could have taken his place, and then there was his sister, Alexandria!

As he looked across to the opposite side of the grandstand he could see the grand duke's box, and outside the enclosure sat Paul, talking gayly to a man beside him—a chance acquaintance it seemed. Why didn't Paul warn him? Vladimir wondered, and then in his heart he laughed at his folly. Warnings meant betrayal, and yet, was it right that the in-

nocent sightseer should be, perhaps, murdered? Vladimir did not like the thought of the word and put it away from him, but he shifted his gaze. To his keen, sensitive nature the whole proceeding suddenly took on the aspect of the cruel, the repugnant, the grotesque. What had the grand duke done save be born into a royal family? Were the principles in which his creed was so well versed mistaken, perhaps, after all? His head swam a little and the crowd danced before his eyes. Ah, well! these were troublous times, though horses were to run for a stake and women were laughing, their gay scarfs fluttering in the breeze, their flags waving and the toy balloons of childhood nodding merrily. Paul, too, had balloons in his hand, a whole bunch of them, and the people near him were smiling at his enthusiasm. Vladimir knew that one of those balloons—it was within the others—had a short handle. It would not float as lightly as the others—ah, no!

Suddenly there were cheers. In the midst of the excitement he thought of Alexandria. How she had wanted to come to the races! It had taken all his powers of persuasion to convince her that the desirable seats were all taken, and that she could go to the more important races that would follow later in the season. She did not understand why he had not thought of taking her with him. How could she? Such secrets were not for women like her—thank God!